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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a critique of various theoretical traditions in the study of schooling. Both the predominant liberal tradition of social and educational theory, with its roots firmly in structural functionalism and human capital theory, and the more radical reproduction tradition, which builds largely on Marxian and Weberian analyses of society, are found to be inadequate in enabling satisfactory understanding of schools as organizations. Neither seems capable of affording satisfactory explanations of the mediations of large-scale social, cultural, and economic influences and structures in the specific circumstances of individual schools. A research approach is therefore advocated for bridging the gap between macro- and micro-analyses, and for working toward a more complete understanding of schools as organizations. Six pages of references conclude the paper. (TE)

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HUMAN ACTION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN THE STUDY OF SCHOOLS AS ORGANISATIONS

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Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, 1985.

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Introduction

This paper presents a critique of various theoretical traditions in the study of schooling. Both the predominant liberal tradition of social and educational theory, with its roots firmly in structural functionalism and human capital theory, and the more radical reproduction tradition, which builds largely upon Marxian and Weberian analyses of society, are found to be inadequate in enabling satisfactory understanding of schools as organisations. Neither seems capable of affording satisfactory explanations of the mediations of macro social, cultural and economic forces and structures in the specific circumstances of individual schools. A research approach for bridging the gap between macro and micro-analyses, and for enabling a more complete understanding of schools as organisations, is advocated.

1. Social Stability and the Possibility of Transformation

1.1 Structural functionalism, human capital, and the liberal tradition

In the traditional liberal view of education and society, education is seen as capable of altering individual capacities and, therefore, individual positions in the stable and enduring social and economic structure. Such assumptions were fundamental to the dominant approaches to the sociology of education in the 1950s and 1960s, structural functionalism and human capital theory. Both conceptualise education as a "socially powerful, politically feasible means of attacking a broad range of remarkably diverse social and economic problems" (Papagiannis, Klees & Bickel, 1982:246) while maintaining the essential equilibrium and continuity of society.

Karabel and Halsey refer to structural functionalism as the "prevailing orthodoxy" in American sociology of education in the 1950s (1977:3). Durkheim (1956, 1961, 1964) is usually regarded as the founder of sociological functionalism (Swingewood, 1975) because of his view that the purpose of social institutions is to fulfill social needs and thus contribute to the functional unity of society. Harmony, or social order, is achieved by normative means which prevent serious, dysfunctional conflict. The predominance of such a functionalist perspective was due in no small part to the work of Parsons, who was also concerned with the social integration of members of society through their acceptance of shared values. By encouraging a common belief system and appropriate social behaviour, education contributes to social consensus and stability (Parsons, 1959, 1960). Hence, "the education system functions to develop the technical skills and the norms necessary to the particular stage of a society's development" (Papagiannis, Klees & Bickel, 1982:250. See also Clark, 1962; Dreeben, 1968).

Human capital theory has in common with structural functionalism an emphasis upon both the technical function of education and the efficient use of human resources (Karabel & Halsey, 1977). In the vein of neo-classical economics, the rigors of education, seen as an investment against deferred economic returns, test and justly reward the varying effort and talent of individuals. Liberal notions of equity and justice are comfortably accommodated within the dominant perspective of "fair, meritocratic competition for the unequal social rewards offered" (Papagiannis, Klees & Bickel, 1982:251). Equal chances for all means a system that is, supposedly, both fair, at least in terms of access if not outcomes, and efficient.

Schools, then, are regarded within this tradition as meritocratic institutions in which differential rewards can be justified and accommodated within the ideals of western democracy (Clark, 1972). Moreover, the socialisation process in schools, which results by and large in the acceptance of the meritocratic nature of society, is seen in this context as preserving common values which should be shared by society's members. Social stability is therefore continually enhanced and preserved. Any social change that may occur is necessarily piecemeal and adaptive, and, most importantly, is internal to the normative framework of a given society (Parsons, 1960).

1.2 The Radical Critique

The important point argued by the radical critics of structural functionalism is that life chances are not so much promoted by schools as restricted by them. That is, the radical tradition of society is rooted in a conflict theory which derives largely from neo-Marxian (Apple, 1979, 1982; Althusser, 1971; Carnoy, 1982; Edwards, 1979; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1982, 1983) and neo-Weberian (Collins, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Watkins, 1984) perspectives. Because the neo-Marxian and neo-Weberian positions share a conflict theory of education, it is unnecessary for the purposes of this paper to review their separate development in any detail. Briefly, however, from a neo-Weberian perspective, most clearly articulated by Collins (1971, 1977), the education system is regarded as being a site of competition between various status groups for wealth, prestige and power. The notion of "status group" largely overcomes the narrowness of the Marxian class division which is

problematic in modern capitalism (Wright, 1980; Abercrombie & Urry, 1983). Society is seen as a hierarchy of status which is based not only on the private ownership of productive property, but also upon status group consciousness and cultural traits. There is much similarity, however, between some neo-Marxian and neo-Weberian perspectives, and some leftist scholars are heavily dependent upon both traditions without necessarily claiming to be Marxists of Weberians (e.g. Giddens, 1979, 1981). Moreover, many neo-Marxists are sympathetic to the Weberian stratification approach but argue that such a view of status attainment still remains ultimately dependent upon class position (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Karabel & Halsey, 1977). Such considerations have prompted recent scholars to argue that attempts to distinguish between Marxian and Weberian approaches to class are neither appropriate nor useful (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1980; Abercrombie & Urry, 1983).

In the radical tradition, schools are not to be regarded as neutral arenas in which all children start out with equal chances in the competition for the technical knowledge and credentials that may lead to future income. Instead, rather than holding out equal opportunities for <u>individual</u> mobility as promised by liberal theorists, schools are thought to maintain and reproduce a system of <u>structured</u> inequality over time:

> The Marxian view of education and society ... is class-based and historical. Individual behaviour is the product of historical forces, rooted in material conditions ... Conflict in this approach is not resolvable by universal rules because such rules are class-based; they serve particular interests - the interests of the dominant class (Carnoy, 1980:2-3).

Schooling, therefore contributes to the organised reproduction of both the forces of production and the relations of production that serve the interests of the capitalist class (Carnoy, 1980; Sarup,

1984). The forces of production are reproduced through the legitimation of the divisions of labour and divisions of knowledge (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Braverman, 1974). The correspondence principle of Bowles and Gintis (1976), for instance, stresses the structural correspondence between schooling and economic production. As they explain:

> The educational system helps integrate youth into the economic system, we believe, through a structural correspondence between its social relations and those of production. The structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the workplace, but develops the type of personal demeanor, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social class identification which are crucial ingredients of job adequacy. Specifically, the social relationships in education ... replicate the hierarchical division of labor (Bowles & Gintis, 1976:131).

Students therefore emerge from schools with different attitudes and skills, already allocated, by and large, to their "proper" places in a hierarchical society and workforce. And, more importantly, because the maintenance of structural inequality over time demands that differential class relations within the workplace be accepted as normal and natural, the allocation process takes place primarily in schools, which legitimate economic and social stratification.

The relations of production, according to a conflict view of society, are reproduced through the reinforcement in schools of predominant ideology and culture so that they are taken for granted as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Giroux, 1981). That is, "social reproduction occurs via cultural reproduction" (Taylor, 1984:4) since, as Bourdieu and others suggest, "the inheritance of status in modern societies takes place through the transmission of 'cultural capital' [which makes misleading] the distinction between ascription and achievement" (Karabel & Halsey, 1977:19). Ultimately, then, the radical educators who support this

view argue that the liberal educational system legitimates and reproduces capitalist rationality through "the control of meanings, through the manipulation of the very categories and modes of thinking we commonsensically use" (Sarup, 1984:2). As Giroux argues:

> [Reproductiive rationality] focusses its attention upon macro-structural relationships and how these relations in the form of structural determinations shape, as well as limit, the actions of human beings. Unlike traditional functionalist accounts, which are also concerned with the ways institutions shape society, reproductive positions reject consensus as the normative glue of a social system; instead, they focus on the way in which dominant classes are able to reproduce existing power relations in an unjust and unequal society (1981:13).

Both economic reproduction and cultural reproduction perpetuate inequality under the semblance of fairness and equal opportunity as schools are regarded as merely neutral transmitters of "the benefits of a valued culture" (Giroux, 1983:267). Therefore:

> According to Bourdieu, it is precisely the relative autonomy of the educational system that "enables it to serve external demands under the guise of independence and neutrality, i.e., to conceal the social functions it performs and so to perform them more effectively" (Giroux, 1983:267).

The "objectivity" and "neutrality" of the education system is regarded by radicals as being completely mythical (Papagiannis, Klees, Bickel, 1982). Thus, although there are important differences in specific approches, critical sociologists see schools as one of society's most important cultural apparatuses which work to maintain ideological hegemony and to restrict the development of working class consciousness (Althusser, 1971: Gramsci, 1971; Poulantzas, 1978; Papagiannis, Klees, Bickel, 1982).

The important notion of hegemony is the "essential ingredient" in Gramsci's social analysis (Welton, 1982:141). It refers to a process of ideological rather than coercive control whereby the ruling class culture and view of the world is passed "through a whole

tissue of complex vulgarisations to emerge as 'common sense': that is, the philosophy of the masses, who accept the morality, the customs, the institutionalised rules of behaviour of the society they live in" (Fiori, 1973, in Welton, 1982:141). In this way, ruling classes gain consent to their domination from the very groups who are dominated. Schools, according to Althusser in particular, operate largely to secure such consent.

Although both Althusser and Gramsci are concerned with means by which domination is accepted by subordinate groups, however, they exhibit quite different approaches. The difference is related to one of the major issues of contemporary Marxism, the distinction between structuralist and culturalist approaches. The structuralist version of Marxism, which Althusser's work illustrates, displays considerable weaknesses that are addressed by Giddens (1976, 1979, 1981) as discussed in the following section.

1.3 Agency and Structure

Despite the power of the radical critique of structural functionalism and the liberal tradition at the level of explanation of social stability, there remain striking similarities between, for instance, Parson's functionalism (1957, 1959, 1960) and the version of structural Marxism popularised by Althusser (1970, 1971) in that neither regards social transformation as an empirical possibility unless specific and necessary historical conditions are met. For Parsons, social stability and system sameness are ensured by commitment to common patterns and value consensus. For Althusser, social determination is largely of an economic nature but is no less pervasive for being insidious and in the interests of a dominant

class which governs social and economic structures. As Giddens points out, "Parson's actors are cultural dopes, but Althusser's are structural dopes of even more stunning mediocrity" (1979:52).

Such Marxist structuralism shares with traditional structural functionalism a blindness to the independently creative capacities of humans who, despite the force of ideologies and dominant symbol systems, always retain "some degree of penetration of the social forms which oppress them" (Giddens, 1979:72). In the logic of both structural functionalism and structuralist Marxism, "the teleology of the system either governs (in the first) or supplants (in the second) that of actors themselves" (Giddens, 1979:112) because social actors are regarded as talking, thinking, working, acting in conditions of which they have no understanding. The reproduction of society occurs "behind the backs", it is argued, "of the agents whose conduct constitutes that society" (Giddens, 1979:112). Such cultural determinism is challenged by Giddens (1976, 1979, 1981) who argues that the possibility of social transformation is inherent in the ongoing dialectic between agency and structure, and between continuity and change:

> All social reproduction is grounded in the knowledgeable application and reapplication of rules and resources by actors in situated social contexts: all interaction thus has, in every circumstance, to be contingently "brought off" by those who are party to it. Change is in principle involved with social reproduction - again in both its basic sense and in its "generational" sense - in its very contingency: social systems are chronically produced and reproduced by their constituent participants. Change, or its potentiality, is thus inherent in all moments of social reproduction (Giddens, 1979:114).

Such a dialectical view, Giddens claims, is exactly the standpoint that Marx himself takes in the Grundrisse when he argues that:

> ... every social item "that has a fixed form" appears as merely "a vanishing moment" in the movement of society. "The conditions and objectifications of the process", he continues, "are themselves equally moments of it, and its only subjects are individuals, but individuals in mutual relationships, which they equally reproduce and produce anew" (in Giddens, 1979:53).

The point being made here by Marx illuminates somewhat his famous but pithy statement from the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte:

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past (in Watkins, 1985:8).

That is, any understanding of the continuity/change duality can never be gained by seeking explanations from either the nature of social structure or the subjectivity of human agents alone. Instead, human beings must be seen in a dialectical relationship with social structures. And in the interaction between agents and structures people have, at each and every moment, both a relative autonomy from, and a relative dependence upon, social structures.

Such dialectical thinking can enable understanding of continuity and change in organisations. For it is in such spatially and temporally specific contexts that "the continual flux of interaction between agent and structure" (Watkins, 1985:14) may be most readily perceived. Such a dialectical, processual perspective of organisations directly challenges the system-structural approach which has in modern times guided organisation theory.

In the next section, traditional approaches to the study of organisations, including schools, will be examined and critiqued. The discussion which follows will elaborate upon the theoretical and empirical possibilities of a dialectical approach to organisational analysis which views schools as cultural sites.

2. The Study of Organisations and Schools

2.1 Organisations as Systems

Just as structural functionalist and human capital views of education have been challenged in recent years by more radical perspectives, traditional views of organisations have also been increasingly challenged during the past decade. As Greenfield (1973, 1983, 1984), Bates (1980, 1981), Foster (1981, 1983) and others have pointed out, traditional studies of schools as organisations, in particular, have attempted to understand them according to technical or bureaucratic norms. The fundamental assumption which undergirds traditional approaches is that the structure and operation of organisations can be explained by universal laws which exist and which can be empirically discovered. According to Greenfield:

> In the contemporary study of organizations ... theorists have taken as their justiciation the claim that their knowledge rests on the method of science and that it leads to the understanding, prediction, and control of the dynamics of organizations (1984:3).

Such control is thought by traditional organisational theorists to be possible because organisations are conceived of as systems which interact with larger systems called environments and the even larger system of society (Barnard, 1938; Simon, 1945; Katz & Kahn, 1966).

The organic metaphor (Morgan, 1981) of social system is consistent with the structural functionalist view of society and place of education within it (Parsons, 1960) that was reviewed earlier. According to Barnard (1938), organisations, like organisms, are possessed of a cooperative morality to which their human occupants seek a sense of commitment. Getzels, Lipham and Campbell (1968) explain that harmony and efficiency result from such commitment:

> ... when the needs of the individual and the goals of the system are congruent, there is a feeling of identification with the system. When the needs of the individual and the expectations of the role-set are congruent, there is a feeling of satisfaction and belongingness in the system. When the expectations of the roles and goals of the system are congruent, there is a feeling of rationality regarding the system (in Greenfield, 1983:18-19).

That people need to identify with and belong to the system, be it organisation or society, is taken for granted as a basic tenet of human nature. This belief makes it possible, or even "natural", to define the behaviour of those people or groups who do not conform and belong as being merely pathological or deviant and not oppositional. The purposes of person and organisation should be congruent.

From this point of view, the aim of the organisation theorist is to:

> ... improve organizations by making them more efficient and effective and to make them serve better the needs and interests of the individuals who inhabit them ... The administration of the organization becomes a largely rational and technical matter (Greenfield, 1984:3).

Emphasis upon supposed universal laws, laws of behavioural science and universal (closed or open) systems, imbues organisations with a reified sense of independent reality which denies the fact that organisation is produced by people and can be reproduced by them:

> It is true that organizations appear to be solid, real entities that act independently of human control and are difficult to change. Yet the paradox is that the vital spark, the dynamic of organization is made from nothing more substantial than people doing and thinking. Organizations are limited by and defined by human action (Greeenfield, 1980:27).

Organisation has thus become narrowly regarded as a thing, a completed product that is produced without the help of human hands, rather than as a continuous process of organising (Angus, 1983; Brown, 1978; Greenfield, 1983) in which power is exerted to ensure the cooperativeness of people (Angus, 1983; Selznick, 1962; Weber, 1968). This view of organisations resulted in the search for the "One Best System" (Tyack, 1974) in which schools would play an important part (Parsons, 1959; Dreeben, 1968):

> This was a heady vision and one in which education was a fundamental agency. For although many things were necessary for this desirable state of affairs to come about, three things were essential: a selection and allocation of individuals to appropriate positions, a system of socialization into the norms and values of society; and a system of rewards and inducements that would maintain motivation and commitment (Bates, 1982c:15).

An important point in this vision of the "one best system" is that the relationship between individual, organisation and society is regarded as unproblematic. Organisations are viewed as existing within the normative framework of society which is accepted as given. They are seen neither in relation to social struggle nor their own histories. The resultant oversimplified theories of organisation can be seen in relation to reproduction theories of society for, in the simplistic notions of system congruence and system maintenance, organisations are seen merely and uncritically as reproductive mechanisms (Golding, 1980; Forester, 1982; Salaman, 1981). That is, modern organisation theory allows analysis only of institutions, and, by limiting themselves to the examination of "measureable facts" of organisations and the "manifest behaviour" of organisational actors, researchers

> ... implicitly endorse the social conditions which have created those facts and those behaviours. The supposedly objective analyst becomes a political actor, working on behalf of the status quo (Denhardt, 1981:633).

Far from being value-free, then, much organisational research reinforces and gives additional legitimacy to the underlying assumptions of orthodox organisation theory and to the prevailing conditions of society.

One of the most striking aspects of such conventional organisation research is that it fails to treat class in any serious fashion and so produces analyses of organisations that are devoid of

political considerations but replete with consideration of supposedly neutral management techniques. As Salaman writes of such research:

> Inequalities within organizations are given little attention, in the face of vigorous speculation about organizational structure and its determinants; the distribution of power, and the design of jobs (elsewhere seen as elements of class situations, or as reflections of class conflicts) are conventionally regarded as outcomes of technical problems and priorities. If the possibility of conflict within organizations is granted (as it is in only some traditions of organizational analysis) it is regarded simply as a fact of organizational life, not as directly related to class relationships (1981:228).

Salaman's work illustrates the many parallels between organisational structures and class structures, and the way in which organisational techniques of control contribute to class reproduction under the guise of impartial rationality:

> ... without the clear recognition that the design of work, the distribution of work rewards, the process of organizational control and legitimation, and relations between grades of employee within the plant relect the class relations of the wider society our understanding of organizational process and structures can at best be partial, at worst, hopelessly unreal (Salaman, 1981:229-230).

Salaman adds that "a major reason for the popularity of functionalist approaches to employing organizations is precisely because they permit a classless and de-politicized conception of the enterprise" (1981:230). As he points out, "Such an unrealistic and inadequate conceptualization has done much to hinder the development of a more successful - and realistic - form of organizational analysis" (1981:230).

Yet the underlying classless consensus and irrefutable, technical, neutral rationality, that are assumed by conventional organisation theorists to be part of organisation in a capitalist industrial society, are clearly not as pervasive as such theorists

claim them to be. Clear evidence is provided by the work of Edwards and his colleagues (Edwards, 1979; Gordon, Edwards & Reich, 1982) that, far from being settled and stable, industrial or business organisations are continually in the process of adjustment and readjustment through the interactions and conflicts of their members. As Apple writes of this important research:

> We cannot understand the real history of changing management structures from, say, Taylorism to the human relations school of management to the current experiments in worker participation without seeing the way labor has always acted back and attempted to alter the terrain on which labor/management conflicts have been grounded. Labor has not always been successful in this, but the point that must be recognised is that the outcome is only a moment in a larger dynamic of constant conflict, incorporation of dissent, temporary accords and changes (Apple, forthcoming).

Such an argument adds weight to Greenfield's critique of modern organisation theory, the basis of which is his claim that "the organisation can have no ontological reality beyond the concrete specifications of individuals whose attitudes, values and motivations define organisation" (Greenfield, 1983:50). From this point of view, negotiation occurs in organisational settings (Garfinkel, 1967; Gronn, 1982) in which reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Garfinkel, 1967) and which may, therefore, be "reconstituted by conscious choice and effective action" (Denhardt, 1980:630. See also Habermas 1970, 1979; Marcuse, 1968). This latter point, however, is under-developed by both Garfinkel (1967) and Berger and Luckman (1967) who describe such negotiation and reality construction as being essentially unimpeded by social constraints and considerations of imposed power. Their position is therefore a socially conservative one (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). As Giddens (1979, 1981) reminds us, however, such action occurs in circumstances

of only relative autonomy. At any temporal and spatial point there are structures which limit human agency even though, as Bhaskar points out, organisations themselves are "a collecton of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce and transform but which would not exist unless they did so" (1979:45).

An adequate study of organisations, therefore, would need to investigate the ongoing process of organising, the interactions and conflicts that produce, reproduce and transform organisations, and the historical and structural constraints upon transformation. Such research would offer an alternative to the established positivist paradigm which has guided the study of organisations and which, according to Benson (1977a), has entered a period of crisis. Such a conclusion seems reasonable given the above critique of organisational analysis. Similar claims in the literature in educational administration have been made by Erickson (1977) and Griffiths (1979) as well as by Bates (1980, 1982a) and Greenfield (1983, 1984).

2.2 Schools as Organisations

Within the supposed social stability of the structural functionalist world, schools, as was pointed out in the first section of this paper, played an important part in ensuring that the harmony of the system was not disturbed by generational change. Indeed it was the function of the school and the family, the "pattern maintenance" function, to ensure the commitment of diverse young people of various social and economic origins to the overriding values of the social system that would thus remain stable over time (Parsons, 1957. See also Bates, 1982c). Through a shared vision of the "one best system" (Tyack, 1974; Parsons, 1959; Dreeben, 1968), education could maintain across generations, it was argued, the

motivation and commitment to an idealised system which promised continual social progress (Bates, 1982c). The work of education in controlling and guiding society towards the one best system was not to be underestimated because, according to Bressler's (1963) argument:

> Social change can be controlled by the application of disciplined intelligence ... the educational process is the only alternative to stagnation or revolutionary violence. It is the duty of education to preside over gradualistic change toward a more perfect expression of the demoratic tradition (Bressler, in Bates, 1982c:15).

As was also discussed above, scholars in the radical tradition of conflict sociology, have strongly argued that in the structural functionalist approach to society and schooling, schools become apparatuses of social control which maintain capitalist domination (Althusser, 1971). Far from fulfilling their promise of greater democracy, equality and freedom, schools ensure the ongoing oppression of the majority while preserving and legitimating the privileged position of a few (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). So pervasive is this control, according to Althusser, that those who might strive to implement change within schools face overwhelming odds.

It is against such overly determined perspectives of both structural functionalist and structural Marxist accounts of schools and society that Greenfield's critique of organisation theory, as outlined above, can be seen to hold out hope for the possibility of radical change within the school system. While affording a significant advance upon such deterministic approaches to schooling, however, the voluntarism of Greenfield's position perhaps does not take seriously enough the ideological and structural parameters within which any educational change must occur. Any notions of possibilitarianism or romantic individualism must be balanced against the duality of agency and structure (Giddens, 1979, 1981; Bhaksar, 1979):

> The duality of agency and structure transcends the dualism of voluntarism, in which agents are free from any constraint, and structural determinism, where the conditions not the agents act, through the recognition that institutions are made up of actors who indulge in practices which are both constrained and enabled by those institutions. In this way human agency can often transcend and overcome organisational structures which exercise domination over them. Such practice, while sometimes not being acknowledged by the actors as such, consequently lead to the generation, maintenance or transformation of these institutions (Watkins, 1985:29).

2.3 Schools as Cultures

One particularly enlightening insight which Greenfield provides, nevertheless, is in his description of schools as sites of cultural negotiation between those people who have a stake in them:

> what many people seem to want from schools is that schools reflect the values that are central and meaningful in their lives. If this view is correct, schools are cultural artefacts that people struggle to shape in their own image. Only in such form do they have faith in them; only in such form can they participate comfortably in them (Greenfield, 1973:570).

This insight is extremely important because the functionalist rationality which still dominates approaches to school organisation and administration treats schools "as merely instructional sites designed to pass onto students a 'common' culture and set of skills that will enable them to operate effectively in the wider society" (Giroux, 1984:36, emphasis added). Such a view, based on a conception of education which separates fact from value, ends from means, assumes that schools are politically neutral whereas, when studied as both instructional and cultural sites:

> Schools must be seen as institutions marked by the same complex of contradictory cultures that characterise the dominant society. Schools are social sites constituted by a complex of dominant and subordinate cultures, each characterised by the power they have to define and legitimate a specific view of reality (Giroux, 1984:37).

Thus, contradictions over such "message systems" of schools as pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation (Bernstein, 1977), and over class, gender, and political and social futures (Apple, 1982, 1983; Watkins, 1983, 1985) create tensions which are mediated only by the influence of human agents upon the current practices and organisation of schooling. And these themselves have been produced by historical practice which has shaped educational structures in an ongoing dialectic of continuity and change of what is to constitute the culture of the school.

As Bates (1982d) makes quite clear, an understanding that schools are cultures is essential for any understanding of schools as organisations:

> Foster (1980), Giroux (1981), Greenfield (1979, 1980), and Bates (1980, 1981) have all argued the necessity of constructing a cultural analysis of educational administration as an alternative to the inherently sterile pursuit of a deterministic behavioural science. This is not solely because the dynamics of organisation can better be understood through such a perspective but also because educational organisations, above all, are committed to the maintenance, transmission and recreation of culture (Bates, 1982d:9).

Culture is, in this view, "the prime resource", and, one might add, the prime mediator and outcome, of educational practice. Schools are, therefore, inescapably cultural sites.

2.4 Cultural Sites and Research Traditions

The hegemony of the dominant culture, as discussed earlier, is mediated through such institutions of civil society as schools. And while such mediation encourages the reproduction of cultural patterns and social arrangements, actors in specific institutions always retain a degree of relative autonomy which allows for "those non-reproductive moments that constitute and support the critical notion of human agency" (Giroux, 1983:285). The lived culture of

school life, the result of material conditions of everyday practices, provides a set of meanings which are not merely imposed upon actors in school situations, but which are nevertheless limited by institutional constraints such that, "macro-economically our work may serve functions that bear little resemblance to even our best intentions" (Apple, 1981:134). For this reason research in schools must look beyond the intentions and perceptions of individual participants because an understanding of the relationship between schools and society requires a critical perspective which can address the connections between everyday activity in specific schools and the broader social, cultural and structural issues that relate to such activity.

The established paradigm of organisational analysis, however, fails to make such connections. This paradigm consists of "interrelated, theoretical, methodological, and practical commitments" which embrace a conceptual scheme of "rational structuring", a methodology that amounts to "a fairly simple form of positivism", and a practical concern solely with administrative-technical effectiveness (Benson, 1977a:3-9). As Benson summarises orthodox studies of organisations:

> Theoretically, the studies have relied upon a rational model. They have assumed generally that the empirical relationships between structural features are to be explained in terms of rational, goal-seeking tendencies of the organization. Methodologically, the comparative-quantitative studies have relied upon an uncritical stance toward the organizational world that is taken for granted by participants (1977a:5).

By outlining four analytical problems that are inherent in the current orthodoxy, Benson (1977a) in a seminal paper, provides an important direction for a more adequate approach to organisational analysis. This approach allows for a dialectical view of organisations and takes into account the critique of orthodox organisational analysis that was outlined earlier.

Firstly, in dealing with human action, recent studies deriving from diverse sources such as ethnomethodology (Bittner, 1965), phenomenology (Silverman, 1971) and Marxism (Benson, 1977b) have addressed ways in which organisational reality is produced and reproduced by people (Benson, 1977a). Benson concludes that:

> Theoretically, the action critique forces us to attend to the processes through which particular organizational patterns have been generated and are sustained ... This forces attention to history, to the sequence of events and contexts through which the present arrangements have been manufactured. It also directs analysis to the ongoing, day-to-day interactions through which a produced reality is sustained (1977a:6).

Research in organisations, therefore, should direct attention to the negotiation, reproduction or alteration of organisational paradigms (Brown, 1978; Imershein, 1977) or organisational cultures (Schein, 1984). This matter relates to the second problem of conventional organisational analysis, that of power:

> Through the exercise of power a paradigm is enforced, action premises are established, the relationships between components are arranged, and environmental interchanges are negotiated ... Conventional approaches study the regularities, the orderly patterning of a produced organisational reality, without inquiring about its production and reproduction. The newer approaches take the latter problems as fundamental; and so power assumes a central place (Benson, 1977a:8. See also Bates, 1982b; Foster, 1980).

The third problem of organisational analysis with which Benson deals is its relationship to other levels of analysis, including analysis of society. Recent work, for instance, in contrast to the predominant paradigm, in which such relationships are not regarded as problematic, has examined the connection between organisations and the structural arrangements of society (Giddens, 1976, 1979; Goldman & Van Houtan, 1977) rather than treating them as distinct, boundary-maintaining entities. Finally, Benson points out that comparative-quantitative studies assume that major organisational factors remain stable. Process oriented analysis, however:

> ... would deal with changes in the underpinnings, in the infrastructure upon which the organisation is built. This would involve attending to ... the ongoing interactions that continuously reproduce the organisation and/or alter it (Benson, 1977a:11. See also Hall & Hall, 1981; Heydebrand, 1977).

Benson's criticisms of the established approaches to organisational analysis are extremely pertinent to studies of schooling. An adequate analysis would need to take such criticisms into account and seek to understand the mechanisms by which the reproductive process, usually conceived of as a society-wide process, is pursued at the organisational level of individual schools.

I have argued elsewhere (Angus, 1984) that both the predominant positivist research tradition in organisational analysis and also more recent interpretivist approaches are generally incapable of explaining the mediations of macro social, cultural and economic structures through education in school sites. Positivist and structural functionalist rationality sees both school and society as natural systems within which individuals, whose behaviour can be predicted and controlled, seek to conform to societal norms. The assumption of an underlying value consensus limits both the formulation of problems to be studied and the conceptualisation of possible solutions. Fact finding methods and the imposition of artificial categories to differentiate the data fail to do justice to the complexity of social reality (Sharp & Green, 1975; Bredo & Feinberg, 1982). In interpretative research, on the other hand, emphasis is upon the social construction of reality as individuals and groups collectively construct meaning systems through the negotiation of definitions of the situation. Such research, however, which often stresses description over interpretation and explanation, does not provide sufficient basis for critical judgements. The value

of such research is therefore limited by its epistemological relativism. Thomas (1982) explains this point in relation to ethnography:

> One value of ethnographic research is its focus upon how people enact a social world by conferring and negotiating meaning through social interaction. Yet ethnography may not carry this project of social construction far enough. By overemphasising the given, ethnography rarely rises above the immediacy of the examined situation. By accepting as unproblematic the social features observed in a particular situation, ethnography can represent (in its often discursive and formulistic style) a naive realism within which a correspondence between categories of analysis and the objects they mirror is assumed. In brief, ethnography may present a distorted image of how human social subjects actually do the work of producing a social world (1982:129).

4. Critical Ethnography

In this section, an argument will be briefly sketched that critical ethnography may afford understandings and explanations that largely address the criticisms of the positivist and interpretevist research traditions that were briefly noted above (see Angus, 1984). Such ethnography would enable organisational analysis of the kind advocated above by Benson (1977a). Critical ethnography, while taking advantage of the advances of the interpretative tradition over positivism, would depart from more traditional ethnography in significant ways - especially in its use of theory, which would enable the researcher to address questions of reproduction and transformation, and, related to its theoretical perspective, in its appreciation of the dialectic between human interaction and social and organisational structures.

A more explicit linking between theory and data than is usually the case in the conventional ethnographic tradition represents a move towards what has recently appeared in the literature as "critical ethnography" (Maseman, 1982; Thomas, 1983; see also Simon, 1983). According to Maseman:

> "Critical ethnography" refers to studies which use a basically anthropological, qualitative participant observer methodology but which rely for their theoretical formulation on a body of theory deriving from critical sociology and philosophy (1982:1).

This definition raises ontological issues and considerations of human nature which, in addition to epistemological issues, pervade research methods (Bernstein, 1978; Burrell and Morgan, 1979). As Maseman explains:

> Critical approaches are distinguished from interpretive approaches primarily by their connection to theoretical perspectives which are linked to a general theory of society and a concept of social structure which exists beyond the actor's perception of it (1982:9).

Such an ethnography, then, is ontologically grounded in the dialectic between human behaviour and social and organisational structure (Giddens, 1979; Benson, 1977b). This has implications for the relationship between ideology and educational research, and the interests with which research is inevitably allied (Angus, 1984). For to consider the social and organisational relationships in schools as simply organisational and structural realities - as both positivist and interpretative research do (Angus, 1984) - and "to present them as if they were naturally occurring phenomena, historically neutral and obviously necessary, is to mystify people and to act to render them powerless. By helping people solely to adapt to 'what is', you help to maintain what is" (Simon, 1983:238).

If social structures, social relationships and organisations are seen as being in a continual state of "becoming", researchers will ask different questions about them than if they are trying to describe or even explain "what is". A dialectical, critical ethnography would consider organisations from a viewpoint which is clearly stated by Benson:

> Dialectical theory, because it is essentially a processual perspective, focusses on the dimensions currently missing in much organizational thought. It offers an explanation of the processes involved in the production, the reproduction, and the destruction of particular organizational forms. It opens analysis to the processes through which actors carve out and stabilise a sphere of rationality and those through which such rationalised spheres dissolve (1977b:12).

But the mechanisms by which organisational forms are produced, reproduced, transformed by organisational actors must occur within an existing social structure that both constrains and enables such action. Organisations such as

schools must be seen as constituent parts of wider social arrangements, yet they necessarily retain partial autonomy which may lead to tensions or "contradictions" between the parts and the whole (Benson, 1977b). As Foster, elaborating on Benson's dialectical approach, points out:

> ... a social world, if indeed it is subjectively created, is created within the confines of an existing social structure which provides its own definitions and meanings. But it also allows for the critique of that structure so that people may transform it. A second dimension concerns the concept of totality: that one must see the organisation as a unit in context, the context of the larger social system (1983:29-30).

A critical ethnography, then, through a dialectical approach, represents an attempt to deal with both broad social structural issues and issues of participants' social action in everyday life (Maseman, 1982; Thomas, 1983; Willis, 1977). Thus, such an ethnography is able to address relationships between myth and ideology, social behaviour and social structure. Or as Thomas observes:

> ... a critical ethnography offers an opportunity to examine how participants in a given social setting actively <u>create</u> meanings that generate the human practices out of which structures emerge. In this sense the gap between micro- and macro-analysis dissolves, in that ethnography is necessarily a means of examining how social structure and interaction are connected (Thomas, 1983; see also Collins, 1981).

Such a critical ethnography would be able to expose the contradictions, located in time and space, that allow for the possibility of organisational and ultimately of social transformation.

An understanding of schools as organisations requires analysis of the connections between issues of everyday activity in specific schools and the broader social, cultural and structural issues that related to such interaction. However, although the scope of such ethnography must necessarily be limited to a specific and contained locales of social interaction, it would nevertheless involve an investigation of the everyday world of concrete individual actors "who are themselves constituted through historically specific structural forms and processes and are acting within historically

specific institutional contexts and situations" (Sharp, 1982:51). Therefore, any understanding of the present contexts in which continuity and change are negotiated or contested requires an understanding, also, of the relevant history which has led to those contexts.

5. Conclusion

A critical ethnography, as opposed to conventional ethnography, insists upon an ongoing awareness of the fundamental human agency of social actors while simultaneously remaining aware that the subjective consciousness of individuals may conceal underlying structural relationships which are capable of distorting and limiting, or of enhancing and enabling, negotiated systems of meaning (Sarup, 1984; Sharp, 1982). Meaning systems and individual perceptions are not taken at face value to produce explanations that are simply those of the actors. Thus the essential dialectic between theory, or competing theories, and data parallels the human level of experience within social structures in that the actors' consciousness, rather than being taken for granted, must be linked to broader, general theories of society which may exist beyond individual consciousness.

Investigations of schooling, therefore, should attempt specifically to illuminate the process and mechanisms by which the macro forces of the society-wide education system are both reproduced and mediated, through the everyday lived experience and perceptions of human agents, at the level of specific institutions. Such mediation, given the essential human agency of school participants, will never be simple, enabling the automatic reproduction of prior arrangements, but will instead allow also for moments of contradiction which will signify new social or institutional forces, or the beginnings of new organisational paradigms (Brown, 1978) or cultures (Schein, 1984).

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